IVAN GALLERY

Mont Blanc. From the Crest to the Foothills

Alex Bodea, Elijah Burgher, Daniela & Ioana Groza Pop, Luca Istodor, Hortensia Mi Kafchin, Gavril Pop, Miron Schmückle, Kumar Muniandy and Mădălina Zaharia, & a selection from the Petre Sirin archive and the collection of the Queer Museum

Curator: Robert Băjenaru
12.11-20.12.2026

Ivan Gallery is pleased to invite you on Thursday, 12 November, from 6 to 10 pm, to the opening of the group exhibition "Mont Blanc. From the Crest to the Foothills", an exhibition structured around the Petre Sirin archive.

"Petre Sirin loved during an era when his love was punishable by imprisonment. He was a film director at the Sahia Studio in Bucharest, but when it became dangerous to be who he was, he retreated to Bran alongside Saşa, the partner with whom he spent an entire lifetime. The state held rigid views on how one should live one's life. Sirin, however, had other plans. Within his own house, he built an imaginary court where friends were knights and kings of Spain, and rooms bore the names of palaces - a courtly jest that doubled as a survival strategy.

He was shaped by a queer space established by the painter George Tomaziu and supported by his life partner, the translator Dinu Albulescu. A circle of friends and lovers had formed around him, surveilled for years on end by the Securitate. Passing through this group were art critic Radu Ionescu, essayist Nicolae Steinhardt, writer Ion Omescu and his partner, scenographer Mircea Marosin, as well as historian Ioan Dimitrie Suciu. Tomaziu left the country in 1968, following 13 years of imprisonment for opposing both fascist and communist totalitarianism. Sirin stayed. And staying also meant safeguarding the memory of this gay circle of those who had fled or those who were no longer alive.

In a 1973 poem, Sirin wrote that the others had passed away while he had 'endured,' gathering what was left behind: not money or valuables, but old papers imbued with the traces of lived lives. Out of these, he assembled the *Bran Album*, kept between 1949 and 1990. Letters, photographs, drawings by George Tomaziu, and collages are cut and sequenced like cinematic frames, in a language legible to his intimates but only partially grasped by the authorities. While the Securitate was compiling its surveillance files, Sirin was assembling his own album. Two archives with radically divergent purposes.

The exhibition brings these two ways of looking at a queer life face to face. Originating from the archive of the Museum of Queer History and Culture in Romania are the *Bran Album*, period photographs, and Securitate files, alongside the traces of individuals whom official history discarded. Interspersed among them are works by those from Sirin's circle: a work by Geta Brătescu depicting George Tomaziu, three works by George Tomaziu, and a piece by Vasile Mureşan Murivale gifted to Sirin, who was then younger than the others. Florin Buhuceanu, the founder of the museum, writes that Sirin preserved precisely 'that which, through the prohibition of the law, could not be documented'. The police file and the collage thus converge within the same exhibition: surveillance and tenderness, the official document and personal memory.

Around this archive, we invited contemporary artists to engage in dialogue with it, rather than illustrate it. Alex Bodea, Elijah Burgher, Hortensia Mi Kafchin, Gavril Pop, Miron Schmückle, and the duo Ioana & Daniela Groza Pop created new works, faced with this album, stories, and destinies gathered through a single filter: Petre's. A scenario that spanned most years of his life and was in no rush to end, through the intervention of contemporary artists. The Bran Album is vast, and each entered through a different door, guided by their own sensibility and longing. Elijah stayed with the body, caught in the grids of fingerprints and calligraphy, then rediscovered in the album, where the grid is improvised, born from within, and reads the symbols like ciphers with no other key than curiosity and desire. Ioana and Daniela paused at a childlike constellation of stars, fir trees, and paper cutouts and sent it forward, like postcards across time. Miron took as a starting point Sirin's retreat to Bran, a biographical moment from which 'Sotto bosco' emerged. Alex followed the lovers gathered like a bunch of keys and the small rituals that are both care and self sabotage, three people leaning on one another, a candy box always open, alongside a diabetes diagnosis. Hortensia imagined a single embrace in a garden at Bran, a tenderness that no document ever recorded. And Gavril

took the names of imaginary royal houses and raised them as a flag, a public announcement that there is nothing left to hide. They are joined by two existing works: the video work by Kumar Muniandy and Mădălina Zaharia, and Luca Istodor's claymation film, *Saşa and Petre*, structured around an interview with Saşa about his love for Sirin.

The title of the exhibition is drawn from Luca Istodor's film. In one of Saşa's dreams, Sirin tells him that they will climb Mont Blanc together, but this time in reverse: not from the foothills to the crest, but from the crest to the foothills. The exhibition departs from this image to look back toward lives that could not be openly documented in their own time. Not to fabricate a happy ending for them, but to restore a measure of the visibility that was denied to them. Saşa (Alexandru Lupescu) passed away this year, shortly after the publication of his first poetry volume. He had learned about the exhibition beforehand and was deeply moved. In a sense, this exhibition is our response to his joy." (Robert Băjenaru)

"The Petre Sirin Archive, particularly the Bran Album begun in 1949, is essential to Romania's queer and cultural history through its compilation of testimonies regarding lives, relationships, and forms of cultural and identity expression excluded from public memory. The photographs, letters, notes, collages, and homoerotic works associated with the painter George Tomaziu and the group gathered around director Petre Sirin allow for the recovery of an unknown history from the perspective of those who lived it, moving beyond the incriminating depictions found in the files of the Securitate and the Morals Militia.

The survival of such an archive of queer memory and art from the collection of the Queer Museum in Bucharest represents a rarity in the context of Eastern Europe, where legal and social hostility encouraged the destruction, concealment, or dispersal of these artifacts. Its importance to cultural history lies both in the preservation of marginalized artistic practices and works, and in the uncovering of local queer networks, intellectual exchanges, and the bonds linking creation, intimacy, and identity. The visual montages, theatricality, self-irony, and gender play practiced by Sirin, with the support of his life partner Alexandru Lupescu (Saşa), restore the love, friendship, creativity, and solidarities that made the continuity of these lives possible under conditions of criminalization and surveillance, and can be read as an act of resistance against their erasure from history." (Florin Buhuceanu)

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The exhibition can be visited at Ivan Gallery in Cotroceni, 13 Profesor Doctor Dimitrie Grecescu Street, until 20 December, 2026, Wednesday to Saturday from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM, and otherwise by appointment.